
BILL NO: House Bill 76
TITLE: Criminal Procedure - Victims and Witnesses - Restrictions on Release of Personal Information
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: January 21, 2020
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

House Bill 76 would expand the circumstances under which a victim or witness of a crime may shield their personal information from public inspection in a criminal court proceeding. The Women's Law Center (WLC) supports House Bill 76 because victims of misdemeanors, and delinquent acts that would be a misdemeanor if committed by an adult, have the same concerns for safety and privacy as those involved in felonies.

Current law allows a victim or witness to a felony (or a delinquent act that would be a felony if committed by an adult) to request the court shield their personal information, including their address and telephone number, from public inspection of court records. This is done out of concerns for the safety and security of witnesses and victims, as well as respect for their privacy. However, by restricting the ability to shield information to only witnesses and victims of a felony, the law overlooks many witnesses and victims who are survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence, where the most frequent charges brought against abusers are for misdemeanors such as second degree assault. These individuals have the same needs and concerns for their privacy as a victim to a felony, but are denied the same protections. Arguably, the need is even greater for these victims who are frequently harassed, threatened, and intimidated when attempting to access the courts and justice system.

HB 76 is a small expansion of existing law that will have a great impact on increasing the safety and security of those individuals who seek recourse through our criminal justice system. It will help prevent witness and victim intimidation and protect survivors of domestic violence.

Therefore, the Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges a favorable report on House Bill 76.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, membership organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change. The Women's Law Center operates two hotlines, the statewide Collateral Legal Assistance for Survivors Project, the Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County and the statewide Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project.